

## **GROWING UP IN NEW CHINA**

“The world is yours,” Chairman Mao told a group of Chinese students in 1957. “Young people, you are in the bloom of life, full of vigor and vitality... Our hope is in you.” Ten years later, those young people suffered through the Cultural Revolution. Today, China’s youth are facing another revolution—the revolt of the market that has brought wealth and corruption, opportunity and confusion to a country with a GNP growing at breakneck speed.



They are, in a sense, the first generation in China since 1949 that has had to “grow up.” Their parents used to enjoy the “iron rice bowl” system, which guaranteed their livelihood and kept them in child-like dependency on the state. This generation, however, must learn to survive in the free-market system, and be responsible for their own employment, housing, healthcare, and retirement.

What is life like for young people in the world’s most populous nation and fastest growing economy? What do they dream and strive for? What are their ambitions and angst? We will take a look at China’s university student population, the power house of her future.

Harking back to a feudal past where the imperial service entrance exam was the gateway to fame and fortune, education remains the revered avenue to success for book-smart young people. While China’s top schools

still attract the brightest students from around the country, increasing numbers aspire to study abroad. No surprise: the United States is the favorite destination, and Harvard, MIT and Yale, the dream schools.

Rosanna chairs the MIT recruitment committee in Beijing and personally interviews applicants. She said, “These students represent the hope and bright spots of China's future. I hope we can influence them towards building their own people in addition to their personal careers.” This is, in part, the spirit and vision of PESI’s student exchange and leadership programs. We will share with you the story of one young man who came through our program.

While opportunities abound for some, fierce competition leaves many more behind. Contemporary Chinese art, literature and pop culture are riddled with cynicism and despair. Depression is widespread on college campuses and has become the leading cause of suicide among university students according to the *China Youth Daily* (11/27/06). We will look at these dark realities as well.